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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [BK](#)  
SUBJECT: BOSNIA: OPPOSITION BEATS DODIK'S CANDIDATE IN  
MAYORAL RACE, FORECASTS UNIFIED STANCE IN OCTOBER ELECTIONS

Classified By: DCM Jonathan Moore for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

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11. (C) In a special mayoral election in the Republika Srpska (RS) municipality of Bileca on January 24, the opposition coalition candidate defeated the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD). The coalition clinched this victory despite an ardent campaign and alleged pre-election threats from SNSD and its leader, RS Prime Minister Milorad Dodik, who is widely regarded as the most popular politician in the RS. The election result sparked a visceral reaction from Dodik and jubilation from the opposition, whose leaders have stated that it foreshadows a unified front against SNSD in the October 2010 general elections. End summary.

"Together for Bileca" Unites against SNSD  
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12. (SBU) The death in November 2009 of Bileca mayor Slavko Bekan, a member of Dodik's SNSD, led to a special election on January 24. In December 2009, a number of RS opposition parties -- the Serb Democratic Party (SDS), the Serb Radical Party of the Republika Srpska (SRS-RS), the Party of Democratic Progress (PDP), the Democratic Party (DP), and the New Socialist Party (NSP) -- formed an opposition bloc called "Together for Bileca." The parties declared that their coalition's objective was "to (politically) overthrow SNSD leader Milorad Dodik and find common interests." These parties proposed a joint candidate, Dragan Babic of SRS-RS, for mayor. The Banja Luka-based Nezavisne Novine reported on January 25 that 71 percent of Bileca voters cast their ballots in the election, a ten percent increase over the October 2008 municipal elections and a 13 percent increase over the overall RS participation in the October 2008 elections. Dragan Babic won 3,798 votes, defeating SNSD candidate Blazo Vujovic by 663 votes.

Dodik's Earnest Campaign Comes to Naught  
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13. (SBU) Although Bileca has traditionally been an SDS stronghold, this result came as a surprise to SNSD, which captured the mayoralty in 2008 and -- in the face of a viable opposition candidate -- pulled out all the stops to support Vujovic in this election. Dodik visited Bileca on January 22, the last official day of the campaign, and, according to an RS Government press release, handed out keys to new apartments to 18 families of fallen soldiers and war veterans in the municipality. Dodik also allegedly threatened to withhold certain assistance to Bileca if Vujovic was not

elected, a practice he carried forward from the 2008 municipal elections.

#### RSNA Session Comes to (Verbal) Blows

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¶4. (SBU) According to BHT-1, Dodik said that, contrary to the alleged threats, SNSD would continue to implement projects it had already begun in Bileca. He added that SNSD's aim was to win and that he was disappointed but "did not see the result as a tragedy." However, according to Radio BN, the election results sparked a verbal clash between Dodik and SRS-RS President Milanko Mihajlica at a session of the RS National Assembly (RSNA) on January 25. Dodik congratulated Babic, adding that the election showed the democratic capacity of the RS and belied claims that the RS is a dictatorship. He declared that accusations of campaign threats by his party were "an absolute fabrication of Mr. Mihajlica and his coalition partners. There were no threats, although there were various lies. But this was an election campaign!" Dodik added, though, that SNSD comprises a majority in the Bileca Municipal Assembly, as well as heads of departments, who would make the new mayor "look like a plant." Mihajlica interpreted Dodik's statement as a confirmation of his campaign threat and retorted, "The people of Bileca punished you. The fact is that you gave more money to your son and not to inhabitants of Bileca over the past four years." (Note: Mihajlica is referring to allegations that Dodik, through the RS Investment Development Bank, gave a large loan to his teenage son. End note.)

SARAJEVO 00000080 002 OF 002

#### Opposition Rolls up ts Sleeves

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¶5. (SBU) Mihajlica stated publicly that Bileca constitutes the first blow to Dodik from the opposition and that the "final knockout will come in October." Vukota Govedarica, SDS delegate in the RSNA, assessed that SDS would lead the opposition to victory. PDP President Mladen Ivanic told the media that the prevailing factor in the elections was voters who had previously abstained but were now clearly dissatisfied. "The government can no longer keep power with the policy of threats and lies," he said. DS President Dragan Cavic said that this victory was significant but should not be taken as a sign of dramatic change, as the ruling structures still have powerful instruments in their hands, such as media control and money. NSP President Zdravko Krsmanovic said that Bileca election could mark the beginning of the end of "dictatorship in the RS." He said that it is a blow to the ruling party to get this result after it invested so much in Bileca. Krsmanovic claimed that his party's influence took votes from SNSD, which he believes portends a strong showing in general elections. "However, the opposition parties that joined forces must have common objectives to avoid their only aim being to remove Dodik. This aim must be clear: EU membership as soon as possible, fighting crime and corruption, development of the RS, and decentralization of authority to municipalities."

#### Federation Media Elated

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¶6. (SBU) Federation-based media have rejoiced about the Bileca victory. The Sarajevo-based Oslobodjenje reported that "Bileca is the first significant defeat of Dodik," and the pro-Bosniak daily Dnevni Avaz declared that "the government can no longer sustain threats and lies." FTV notes that this is the first election defeat for Dodik and his SNSD since 2006.

#### Next Step: Unified Opposition in the General Election?

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¶7. (SBU) According to the press, the same opposition bloc is

considering a joint candidate to oppose Dodik in the October 2010 general elections. SDS MP Ognjen Tadic, euphoric over the result, told DCM on January 25 that the SDS has a longstanding close relationship with SRS-RS and has lately become closer to PDP. Tadic also said that the coalition might field single candidates at senior levels (for the President of the RS, or the RS member of the Bosnian Presidency) in the October elections, but that for state and entity parliament the parties would likely present separate, competing candidates.

Comment

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18. (C) The victory of the opposition candidate in Bileca may not have been a major upset in that municipality, which has traditionally been an SDS stronghold. Moreover, although SNSD lost in this election, its candidate actually won 1,000 more votes than his SNSD predecessor in the 2008 elections, and one election alone is not an indicator of what will happen elsewhere: Dodik chief of staff Zeljka Cvijanovic confirmed to DCM January 25 that the SNSD was not taking the defeat likely and would invigorate its campaign efforts for the October 2010 elections. The opposition victory could, however, bode well for the ability of these parties to create a unified, viable opposition to Dodik in the general elections in October. Such unity is remarkable in a coalition of such ideologically different parties, ranging from the ultra-nationalist SRS-RS to the left-wing NSP. It can be anticipated that Dodik -- under political threat at home -- will further intensify his anti-state rhetoric to strengthen his position with RS voters. Past elections have shown that Bosnian leaders of all ethnicities see nationalist messages as the way to win elections. Rhetoric on all sides in the RS may sharpen as each side tries to prove that it is the more capable protector of Serb interests.

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